

Organizing 101 Town Hall Questions Answered

April 16, 2026

1) What advice do you have for a member to sharpen their skills so that they could be more effective helping organize on their jobsites?

There are a lot of good trainings that can help you improve your organizing skills! Definitely check in with your reps about attending any of the following:

- Building Union Power Phase 2 Training. This teaches participants how to have a structured organizing conversation, which helps you identify issues, present a vision of how concerted activity can address those issues, and how to inoculate workers and get a commitment for the union.
- Contact your Organizing Director. Often we are looking for ways to increase our capacity, and workers are much more likely to listen to a 'co-worker' from the same jobsite than to a union organizer coming in. DO's can provide you with resources and even training to have impactful conversations on the job.
- Organizing Boot Camps in your District Council. These usually happen in the first quarter of each year.
- The AFL-CIO CLCs and Area Labor Federations often hold local trainings open to all union members.

We also recommended reading [Secrets of a Successful Organizer](#) and [No Shortcuts](#).

2) How is our Organizing Department balancing the issues with the current NLRB and Presidential administration with our need to organize? Are we focusing more on top-down or bottom-up campaigns?

Decisions made at the NLRB affect all working people, regardless of which administration is in power. Organizers and members alike are advised to pay attention to these decisions along with memos on how previous decisions should be interpreted. Ultimately, organizers must adhere to the laws and conduct themselves accordingly, or risk lawsuits and litigation. We learn to adapt and adjust strategies and tactics based on board decisions and how they interpret them. As an example, a decision known as the [Cemex Decision](#) [was](#) during the Biden administration changed the process for how workers seek union recognition. It forced employers to either voluntarily recognize a union that shows majority support, or immediately request a board election, reducing the employers' ability to use voter-manipulation tactics to stall organizing. The current Trump administration hasn't overruled it yet, however there are court

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decisions that are challenging it. Organizers need to know when to push the boundaries to force decisions and when to lay back and not force an issue. It depends on our desired outcome.

Top-down and bottom-up are terms used to describe two organizing strategies. Determining which strategy to use will depend on the sector (construction or non-construction), the country/state/locality, the market/industry's needs, economic conditions, and the District Council's organizational capacity. Typically, elements of both are initially integrated into campaigns, especially during initial market analysis and needs assessments.

3) What would be a proper way to salt in a non-union workplace? And how would we get the contractor to negotiate with the union?

Salting is perhaps the oldest and most original organizing tactic. There are laws and ethical standards that must be adhered to when considering salting as a campaign tactic. Typically, a salting agreement is drafted between the union and the salt. The BM/ST and Organizing Director will approve and administer the agreement with the worker/member, which often includes a set of objectives and parameters to adhere to. A salt is typically used to generate union support and identify leaders to bring demands to the employer, which may include recognition of the union. The employer must either voluntarily recognize the union or force the issue to a certified NLRB vote before negotiating even begins.

Salting is also an effective way to discover violations by low road contractors. Salting is a good way to identify and file unfair labor practices. Discovering OSHA violations, wage and hour and paycheck problems, or environmental violations all can be used to persuade a workforce of the value of a union and bring a contractor to the table.

4) How can organizers work to increase market share in expensive, large markets that currently have a low market share?

There are a variety of challenges in markets with low market share, and we have strategies in place to help us know where to start. We first need to identify the needs of the industry, better understand the perspectives of the worker and the employer, and have the capacity to address those needs. We need to understand if there was a historical event or a series of events that led to where we are today. We look at where construction investments are going and what is driving them. We also need to consider whether the investments are into public infrastructure or private interest, residential or commercial, etc.

Then based on the information you gathered, pick the industry or sector where you think you are most likely to get results. You pick one sector so you can concentrate your resources instead of over extending them. One of the most important things to remember in

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markets like this, is that you will need to build power with the existing workforce. This will help influence the way employers are doing business. Whether that be through running Representational Elections through the NLRB or holding non-responsible contractors accountable. Doing this helps raise industry standards over time and helps us have better conversations with the responsible non-union employers in the area. Once you start a campaign like this you have to be committed for the long haul and stay consistent.

5) Why is the residential sector such a difficult nut to crack for going to the Union?

The residential sector was once a majority union sector, but this was one of the sectors we talk about in the Building Union Power Training as having been lost. Since this sector was left and ignored for so long, a new employer-employee relationship was developed. That relationship is the worker misclassification model that is so prevalent around North America. There is no agency set up to specifically go after employers that misclassify their employees, which is something that we need to push for at the state level. The residential industry is also often an easy place for new companies to get started in, partly because at least in single-family housing, materials are bought by the builder in some cases, the work is repetitive, and there is a high volume of misclassification, which is profitable. Organizing the residential sector is a top priority for us and is part of Resolution 3 from our last convention.

6) Do you need 30% of the crew to sign cards to initiate a union election?

Technically yes, 30% is the minimum amount of support we need on union authorization cards to file for a union election. But we like to wait until we have majority support before filing for an election because we know that once we file, the boss fight will either start or ramp up, and we may lose supporters to confusion and fear. It's important to ideally have so much support that not even the most intimidating employer can penetrate it.

7) What legal aspects of a Project Labor Agreement job prevent other union trades from doing our work?

PLAs are usually negotiated by the Building Trades Councils, and all Trades must give final approval. The agreements have provisions that address trade jurisdiction and grievance remedies. Mechanisms for resolving jurisdictional disputes with other unions are one of the most important aspects of PLAs. The employer is typically responsible for assignment of duty within its scope of work. It's only legal because it's a binding contract, and if there is a jurisdictional dispute they will investigate prior history in that area to help determine proper assignment.

AN IMPORTANT NOTE: jurisdictional disputes are delicate matters that are time-sensitive and the mechanisms to resolve them can be triggered pretty easily. If you see another trade doing our work, don't pick a fight or even say "hey that's our work!" tell your steward or representative ASAP before you do or say anything else.

8) How do we get members to share positive feedback about the union and their fellow brothers and sisters? What's the best approach to handling an active member who is negative and/or discouraging about the union?

Provide an environment where feedback and positive experiences can be shared. Do not shy away from difficult discussions. Explain difficult decisions. We should seek to understand the root of their negative view, often listening and asking questions to better understand their experience, acknowledging they have a grievance or issue and don't solve their problem for them.

9) Why don't we try to go to high schools and try to recruit?

We do this often! This is obviously a decision made by individual District Councils, but we encourage everyone to send reps and members to career fairs and things of that nature to show young people that they have a non-college, middle-class path available to them. But to increase market share we must also add new contractors through organizing to place them and ensure they have steady work.

10) Would the IUPAT be open to Building Union Power being a mandatory class for apprentices to teach union history? I know they teach Human Elements & History in Film. I believe the Union Power class is important to teaching our values and mission in addition to the ones we already offer during the academy. (They may already have it as a mandatory class for apprentices*)

According to our National Guideline Standards, all apprentices are required to complete a minimum of 144 hours of related instruction per year, as outlined in 29 CFR 29.5(b)(4). Within those standards, *Appendix A* specifies that 32 hours must be dedicated to CORE training (Courses 1.1–3.4). Local program standards are developed based on these National Guideline Standards and are generally expected to include these requirements, although some variation in total hours or additional courses may be required due to state-specific regulations. The CORE curriculum is designed to ensure apprentices develop proficiency in key competencies, including (but not limited to):

- Understanding the IUPAT's role in the labor movement from 1887 to the present
- Identifying the organization's responsibilities to its members

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- Demonstrating individual responsibilities as an IUPAT member
- Recognizing the structure of the IUPAT at the International, District Council, and Local Union levels
- Exhibiting strong character and ethical behavior in both personal and professional settings

Courses such as COR 1055 and COR 1056 directly support these competency requirements. While local programs are not mandated to use specific courses or materials, they must ensure that the required competencies are met. **The Building Union Power (BUP) courses represent the most current, relevant, and comprehensive curriculum available to fulfill these CORE requirements, and their use is strongly encouraged.** Additionally, many local program standards or program rules include expectations for participation in union activities or upgrade training. Engagement in Building Union Power initiatives can help satisfy these components as well. While participation in specific courses may not be strictly mandated, it is important to recognize that union membership carries both rights and responsibilities. A strong, informed membership is essential to the success of the organization. Participation in educational opportunities, union events, and initiatives like Building Union Power strengthens both the individual member and the union as a whole. Programs that incorporate BUP curriculum and apprentices who actively engage in it are better equipped to uphold the values of the organization and contribute meaningfully to its continued strength and impact. These classes can also be integrated into STAR course offerings or incorporated into other program touchpoints such as orientation, “back-to-school” sessions, apprentice reviews, or merit increase interviews. There are many opportunities to meaningfully introduce apprentices to our collective history, responsibilities, and values, and leveraging several of these opportunities, rather than relying on a single course, helps reinforce these principles and more effectively develop well-rounded, engaged union members.

11) I prefer doing house visits when visiting non-union members for campaigns and have the best conversations after work. What is the IUPAT's stance on house visits for campaigns currently?

House visits are incredibly important and they're part of all of our campaigns, including our internal Building Union Power campaign. It's necessary to meet workers in a place they feel comfortable and where they can be truly honest about their experiences, fears, and hopes. This is often not the workplace, and it's why we do house visits.

12) Some of our brothers have expressed interest in opening their own union company but aren't sure how to start. Does IUPAT offer resources for our brothers and sisters to open their own shop? Have we discussed a member-to-contractor pipeline? So members can become union employers?

Our Labor Management Corporation Initiative (LMCI) has classes that teach estimating and project management. These classes can be requested through your District Council leadership, but they typically require a minimum number of participants to be held. Your

pension plan does allow for members who are owner-operators to make contributions on their own behalf. *The members should be educated on the fact that they may lose certain member benefits, like voting, if they become 'management'. It's not to dissuade, rather to educate and understand the future impact it may have. The financial reality should also be disclosed; some funds require minimum contributions if an owner/operator, what the bonding requirements are, unfunded liability, etc. to avoid future misunderstandings. There are clear federal guidelines for use of union funds and how they are spent. Some District Councils may have associated credit unions (non-profit financial institutions) that offer member business loans (MBLs). These entities often provide more flexible, community-centric, and lower-interest funding for startups than traditional banks.

13) What's the IU stance on the general strike in 2028?

The International Union is in favor of the General Strike, but there are things we have to work out to be active participants. In many of our collective bargaining agreements, we have no strike clauses. Violation of these clauses can be very expensive. We have to work on adding language that allows us to participate in a general strike, but at the same time, limit the harm that our employers could experience.

14) How do we organize 1099 workers incorrectly classified as independent contractors by their employers?

When organizing a company that misclassifies their employees as independent contractors (1099) for an NLRB election, we must first prove that they are employees, not independent contractors. That means the contractor controls wages, what they do each day, when they show up and leave, and discipline. You can do this through the NLRB by filing for an election with an Unfair Labor Practice that shows they are misclassing the employees to prevent them from organizing.

We also organize 1099 workers through the Fair Labor Standards Act. This act states that employers must pay time and one half after an employee works over 40 hours in a week. It also says an employer must pay them a minimum wage. Typically, employers that classify their workers as independent contractors have them working over 40 hours a week, and we use the Fair Labor Standards Act to hold them accountable.

In Ontario, Canada, District Council 46 has found a way to organize independent contractors the same way they do W2 employees: by getting their labor board to recognize them as dependent employees. These members work under piecework agreements in the residential market. Other unions are exploring something similar in New Jersey to organize Uber Drivers.

15) What can an organizer do to increase members' participation?

Organizers should never give up on anyone. Keep inviting people to events, keep trying to connect with each and every member. One way is by having an organizing conversation – finding out what really matters to the specific member; what they care about – and then connecting whatever your “ask” is (like attending a meeting) to their priorities. *The organizer should have a clear plan for their campaign, with measurable goals and clear objectives where members can see and know their participation is valued and has meaning. The organizers should have their task clearly defined; and be ready to articulate the ‘mission’ to the member.

16) When you say they are forced to negotiate for 1 year if 51 percent of the membership votes to unionize. Does that mean those employees start getting paid union wages effectively immediately?

No. Workers who unionize with us will not see any changes in their pay and benefits until they have a collective bargaining agreement. They also will not pay dues until they have a collective bargaining agreement.

17) How to stop right-to-work jobs?

Single ‘jobs’ aren’t right to work. Right to Work is a state law that generally states a person doesn’t have to become a full union member to enjoy the benefits of the union contract. Education is the best tool to overcome the right-to-work laws in your state, and getting politically active within your union to elect politicians who support us.

18) Can you bring in the DOL for regressive bargaining if they don't bargain in good faith?

This falls under the National Labor Relations Board’s jurisdiction, not the Department of Labor. All that “good faith” bargaining really means is that the employer sits across the table from us, listen, and provide **some** response (it doesn't have to be a good response, "no" counts). But you can file unfair labor practices for regressive bargaining (a particularly Bugs Bunny-style example: if you ask for a \$5 raise and the employer counters with \$1, then you move to \$4 and the employer says "okay, how about \$0.50?, that is bad faith). If we are struggling to come to an agreement, there are other things we can do, like organize! We can do workplace actions and try to get some press coverage to put pressure on the company.

19) Can you give us an example of how members can help in an organizing campaign?

Members are welcome and encouraged to join us in making phone calls to workers, flyering job sites, and coming on house visits. Current members are the best union organizers because they can really explain to workers the union difference and why being a member of the IUPAT is so life-changing.

*members and retirees can be an active participant at local levels of government, actively participating in or monitoring school or city council meetings. They can advocate for change at those levels.

Over the next year all of our District Councils will be launching Volunteer Activist Programs. Where our members can get more involved in our internal and external organizing work.

20) What can I do as a retiree?

Same as above! You can and should feel encouraged to join us in our organizing efforts, and specifically talk about how the IUPAT helped you to have a dignified retirement with a pension – non-union workers don't have that!

21) How do you convince an employee to keep at it when they have been retaliated against by their employer?

Every worker should be angry that their employer has so much power over their lives, including the ability to retaliate against them for choosing to organize. While fear is unfortunately an effective tool for organizing, anger and hope can be even more powerful. Make sure you use open-ended questions when speaking with the worker in order to agitate them around this issue:

“Why do you think your employer is doing this?”

“How do you think you can stop him?”

“Do you think it's fair that your employer gets to control your life? What are you going to do about it?”

* I might even empathize with them, especially around how much time and effort they put into their position. What other sacrifices have they made for this job? I want them to see the value in their own work and investment into the company, and that they shouldn't be the ones to give up and change. The company wouldn't be doing what it is without their capital (their labor investment

22) There are a lot of negative stereotypes when it comes to unions. I find myself on the defensive. How do I get on the offensive when talking to a nonunion worker?

Speak from your own experience with being a union member and use “I” statements. How has the union changed or improved your life? Whether it’s wages, benefits, and/or a dignified retirement, share that with whoever you’re talking to. No one can take your experience away from you. You may not get everyone on board, but some people will hear what you are saying and change their tune.